

Fresno ICUs pushed to the brink

As pandemic ravages Central Valley, county prepares for hospitals to ration healthcare.

By RONG-GONG LIN II, LUKE MONEY AND ANITA CHABRIA

SACRAMENTO — The Delta variant surge reached critical levels in parts of the Central Valley this week, with some hospitals overwhelmed by a crush of COVID-19 patients and Fresno County officials warning they might take drastic action if conditions continue to deteriorate.

Parts of the Central Valley as well as rural Northern California have become the hot zones for COVID-19 in the state even as hospitalizations are beginning to fall in many parts of California, most dramatically in Southern California and the Bay Area, which generally have higher vaccination rates.

In a sign of how severe the crisis has become, Fresno County's health officer said Friday that hospitals may be forced to ration healthcare — choosing who receives life-saving measures — because of dwindling resources.

"The largest hospital systems that we have here in the county are telling us that they are over 100% of their normal capacity, and some of them are as high as 140%, which is really pushing the surge standards and really almost tipping us into what we call the 'crisis standards of care,'" Dr. Rais Vohra, Fresno County's interim health officer, said Friday.

Fresno County's flagship hospital, Community Regional Medical Center, is operating at 112% of its standard operating capacity, and a nearby sister hospital, Clovis Community Medical Center, is at 140%, Dan Lynch, director of the Central California Emergency Medical Services Agency, said at a news briefing.

[See **Fresno**, A12]



AN OBSERVER watches workers process ballots and verify signatures Thursday at the Orange County Registrar of Voters in Santa Ana. Since the recall race tightened in August, Gov. Gavin Newsom has focused not on his accomplishments but on rival Larry Elder.

A 'no' doesn't mean all's well

Gov. Newsom may keep his job, but Democrats want to see party solve problems and fire up voters.

By MARIA L. LA GANGA

So what if the most recent polls are correct, the stars align, and Gov. Gavin Newsom lives to govern another day.

The California Democratic Party and its current standard-bearer would still be wise to listen up when voters weigh in on their performance during the fractious recall season. Voters here have plenty to say. And they're not all that happy.

"The Democrats have got to get out of their comfort zone and go work," said Ann Kays, a retired county employee from Montebello who said she is "so angry I don't even want to talk about it."

The latest polls may have lessened Democrats' alarm, but some voters view the recall effort as a warning: California's dominant political party must own many of the problems the state now faces, such as widening economic inequity, homelessness, rising homicide rates in some cities and the pan-

[See **Democrats**, A7]



VINA ARMSTRONG of Culver City attends a job fair Thursday at SoFi Stadium. "If I do vote," she wonders, "would it help?"

Woman who threw egg at candidate is sought

Conservatives say her gorilla mask showed racial motives in targeting Elder. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Her long history as Elder's liberal prop

Columnist Sandy Banks wears the candidate's criticism as a badge of honor. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Registrars hit with spy-like scrutiny by vote watchers

By PAIGE ST. JOHN

The recall vote-counting has yet to begin, but election officials already are experiencing surveillance befitting a spy novel.

In Seal Beach, election workers arrive to pick up ballots from a county drop box outside of Leisure World and, no matter what time of day they make their rounds, are invariably met by a man who pops out to take their picture. Other election workers report individuals photographing their license plates. At ballot processing centers, volunteer observers keep a close eye on those approving the signatures on unopened ballots — and sometimes are challenging the validity of the signatures, a practice that is banned in some counties and has been declared illegal by at least one

[See **Election**, A8]

Policing is litmus test for Taliban

As group tries to show that it can rule, many Afghans have little choice but to comply.

By NABIH BULOS

KABUL, Afghanistan — It was almost 4 o'clock on a recent afternoon when Mawlawi Shaker, the new chief of this city's Police District 10, leaned back in his leather chair and plopped a foot on the ornate wooden desk before him.

A 35-year-old built like a lanky basketball player, Shaker is from Wardak, a province just east of Kabul, the Afghan capital. He was one week into his job, a position that opened after the Taliban blitzed into the capital last month as the American-backed government collapsed. He had passed through Kabul before but

[See **Taliban**, A5]



TALIBAN policemen work at Police District 10 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Questions have arisen about how the group will enforce its vision of law and order.

9/11 STILL ON THE MINDS OF MANY

Nearly half of Californians report a lasting effect, poll finds

By MELANIE MASON

Two decades after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, a majority of Californians believe the surveillance laws passed in its aftermath were justified, while the state's most conservative and most liberal voters are more skeptical, according to a new poll.

The survey from the Berkeley Institute for Governmental Studies, in partnership with The Times, found that the events of that day remain a vivid memory for three-quarters of the state's voters, and nearly half say 9/11 has had a lasting effect on themselves or their families.

"It was a demarcation point in American life," said Mark DiCamillo, the poll's director. "Here we are 20 years later ... going through long lines at the airport, increased security. It all stems back from that day."

A sizable number of California voters say they have been improperly treated because of increased safety measures. One in four voters report being harassed during security screenings at airports, for example. There is little difference between how Democrats and Republicans say they have experienced mistreatment, but substantial difference among racial and ethnic

[See **Poll**, A12]

Aide weighs fate of 'Dreamers'

Senate parliamentarian to rule if policy can be included in spending bill. **NATION, A6**

Deputy cliques appear on the rise

Survey of L.A. sheriff's officials finds 16% were asked to join a secret group. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

35 of Los Angeles' best plant stores

Find all kinds of growing things plus pots, classes, home goods and more. **SATURDAY, F4-5.**

Weather: Sunny. L.A. Basin: 91/67. **B8**



SEEDS OF DACA: The crackdown on immigration spurred new activism. **A2**

ON THE WEB: Read our comprehensive coverage as we mark the 20th anniversary of the attacks. **latimes.com**